News Releases
Government of Newfoundland and Labrador - Canada

Newfoundland Labrador

January 11, 1996
(Justice)

The following is the text of a statement made yesterday (January 10) by Edward Roberts, QC, Minister of Justice, at a ceremony in Davis Inlet recognizing the swearing in of Innu Peacekeepers as supernumerary constables of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police:

Swearing in of Innu Peacekeepers as supernumerary constables in Davis Inlet

I am pleased to be here today to witness the swearing in of Innu Peacekeepers as supernumerary constables of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. Thank you for including me, as it is an event that deserves to be celebrated by all of us.

Chief Katie Rich first approached the province with a suggestion for an aboriginal police force for Davis Inlet in the summer of 1992. The premier and I - and all of our colleagues - were prepared to support the request. But we could only do so within the guidelines set by Canada's constitution and laws. There are several of these. The first is that the objective could only be accomplished by a cooperative effort by the Innu, the provincial government, the RCMP and the federal government. As a provincial Minister of Justice, my only authority (and my responsibility), is for the enforcement of provincial laws and the Criminal Code of Canada throughout Newfoundland and Labrador. To do its part, the province had to find a way to constitute Band Constables as Peace Officers for the purposes of the enforcement of these laws in a way that would ensure that their authority to do so could not be successfully challenged in a Canadian Court.

We found a way to do this. I met Chief Rich and other representatives of the Innu in Goose Bay in October of 1992. At that meeting, the province suggested that the policing model adopted in Conne River in 1988 would serve the community of Davis Inlet as well as it had the Mic Mac of Conne River, and with cooperation from all parties could be implemented within a relatively short time frame.

The Conne River Band Constables derive their powers to enforce Band by-laws through the federal Indian Act, and their powers to enforce provincial laws and the Criminal Code through their affiliation as supernumerary constables with the RCMP, the provincial policing authority in that region of the province as it is in their part of Labrador.

The second concern was to identify the financial resources required to sustain the Band Constables. A week or so after our meeting, with the consent of Chief Rich, I wrote to then federal Solicitor General, Doug Lewis, to seek for the community of Davis Inlet the same financial support for this arrangement as had been accorded by the federal government to Conne River. This approach was taken because it is the federal government that has both the exclusive constitutional jurisdiction and responsibility to provide special programs in aboriginal communities, and it is they who collect the tax dollars used to pay for such programs. Notwithstanding the fact that Davis Inlet, for reasons that the province respects, has declined registration under the Indian Act, no one can question the fact that Davis Inlet is an aboriginal community, and that the people of Davis Inlet are as entitled as any to share in the benefits available to aboriginal peoples in this country.

The province is grateful to the federal government and to the RCMP for their ultimate support in this endeavour, and grateful also to the Innu of Davis Inlet for their ultimate agreement to work with and through the RCMP in this joint undertaking. In the present legal and constitutional framework of Canada, it is the only way that was available.

I have complete confidence that the agreement we have reached will provide for an enriched and effective police presence in the community which will serve the needs of the people in a way that reflects their community values. We have an opportunity to learn from each other, and it is my sincere belief that we have a lot to learn from the Innu philosophy of policing, with its emphasis on preemptive crime prevention, peacekeeping, healing and reconciliation. It is an opportunity that may well profit us in our move toward community policing throughout the province, and I look forward with optimism and interest as we tackle community problems together.

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